SETH LOW, THE "OPEN-MINDED" MAN.

Student and Merchant and Arbitrator and Mayor of City of Brooklyn.

President of Columbia and Framer of Charter of the Greater City.

By James B. Reynolds, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Citizens' Union.

Corporal in Brooklyn Cadets, Twelve Years Old.

SETH LOW, NOMINEE OF THE CITIZENS' UNION FOR MAYOR.

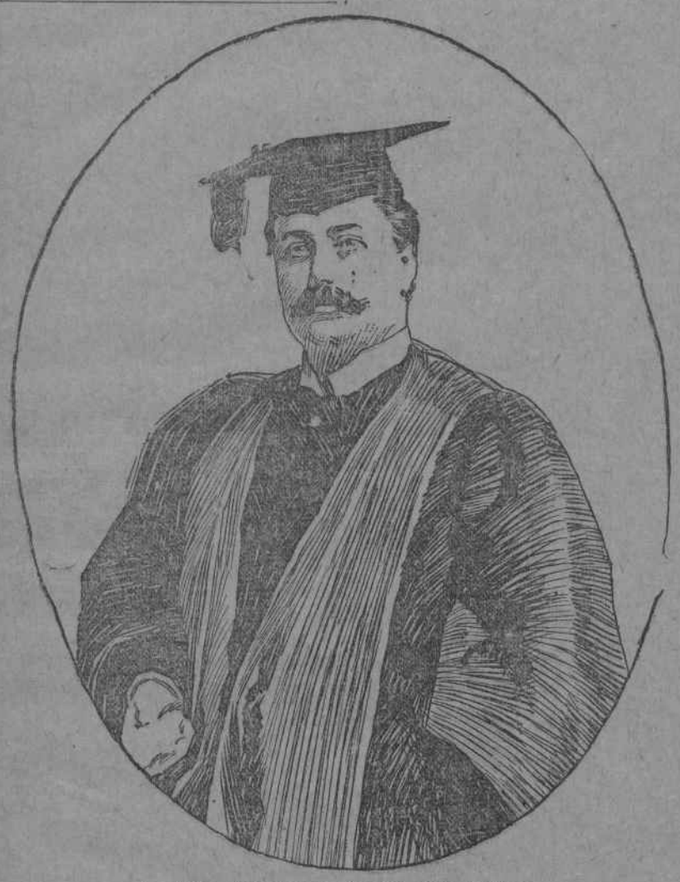
Mayor of Brooklyn, Thirty-one Years Old.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MAN, AS SHOWN BY PICTURES.

Mr. Low is a conspicuous example in many ways of the old assertion that there is an exception to every rule. Born with a silver spoon in his mouth, his career has been moulded rather in spite of than by the wealth in the midst of which he has always lived. He has most successfully overcome what some one has described as the "disadvantages of advantages." It is largely due, doubtless, to the care and wisdom displayed in his up-bringing that he has never displayed, even in the slightest degree, the traits which one is apt to associate with the sons of rich men. Another rule to which Mr. Low is a striking exception is that "a prophet is never without honor save only in his own country." Nowhere is Mr. Low more admired than in Brooklyn, which has intimately known him since he was born there, forty-seven years ago. And in the same manner it is those who know him best who appraise his value most highly.

Probably the most striking characteristic of the candidate for Mayor, as shown throughout his career, is his unswerving consistency. As early as he could participate in public affairs, earlier than most men display civic patriotism, he was a pioneer in the movement advocating a non-partisan administration of municipal affairs. From that time to this, his views on that subject have changed only in so far as they have grown stronger, and his public acts have been forcible illustrations of his belief.

After leaving Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute, when seventeen years old, Seth Low entered Columbia College and was graduated at the head of his class in 1870.



In 1889, President of Columbia College.

Under the system of thorough training and rigid discipline laid down by his father, the young man then went through a business course of the most practical description. Abiel Abbot Low was a China merchant, who founded the firm of A. A. Low & Bros. In that house he entered his son, Seth, as a clerk, and for the next five years he passed, step by step, through the different grades of the business until he was admitted to the firm.

It was while undergoing this training that Mr. Low first began to take a lively interest in public matters. Relief of the poor was one of the first subjects to claim his attention, and with his characteristic thoroughness he devoted his consideration to it in the most practical fashion. When twenty-six years old he became a volunteer visitor to the poor, associating with those through whose efforts the system of public outdoor relief in Kings County was abolished. His object in this movement was two-fold. He sought to eliminate the wasteful dispersion of funds under the old system, and at the same time to find some new means of caring for the needy without injuring their self-respect or encouraging them to regard themselves as objects of charity. He was the organizer of the Bureau of Charities and its first president. This was one of the first examples of organized effort to deal with relief by volunteer work, and its success has more than justified the foresight of those who started it.

The Citizens' Union candidate owed his success in this direction, as in many others, to his ability to get into close touch with all sorts of men in all kinds of conditions. He has a wonderful facility for putting himself in the other man's place and viewing a question from a standpoint outside his own individuality. It is that which helped him to make so successful a record as Mayor of Brooklyn, as an adjuster of labor disputes, and as president of Columbia College. Preserving his own opinions until force of facts leads to a change, Mr. Low can appreciate the opinions of others, and their reasons for them as few men can.

ENTRANCE TO POLITICS.

The campaign for the election of Garfield, in 1880, first brought Mr. Low into the political arena as the president of the Republican Campaign Club then organized. Before that he had done active work with the Republican association of his ward, as young men could do then with more hope of success within the organization than they can now, when character and intelligence seem to be the last considerations in the choice of political machine leaders.

But it was not until the Republican Campaign Club showed itself a potent factor in the election of Garfield that its president achieved anything approaching political fame. After the Presidential election the organization became the Young Republican Club. It made one of the main objects of its being the betterment of Brooklyn government, recognizing as one of the essentials to improvement in that direction the divorce of municipal affairs from State and national politics. Mr. Low had retired from the club before its reorganization, but the future showed that it was to play a highly important part in his life. On the lines which it had laid down for itself the Young Republican Club distinctly left itself free to act without regard to partisan affiliations in choosing candidates for municipal offices.

In the first year of its existence the club had an opportunity, of which it promptly availed itself, to show that its principles on this subject were a matter of practice and not mere theory. Brooklyn was laboring under the bondage of a political gang organized for purposes almost identical with those which actuated the Tweed ring in New York. The opportunity for robbery and corruption in Brooklyn was smaller than in New York, by reason of the city's inferior size and wealth, but, proportionately speaking, it was even more fully used. The municipal election in Brooklyn in 1881 was of especial importance, because on the first of the year following a new charter, greatly increasing the powers of the Mayor, was to go into effect. The Young Republican Club saw that General B. F. Tracy, who received the regular Republican nomination, could not hope to draw enough votes to defeat the Democratic candidate if the campaign were conducted on partisan lines. The club advocated the nomination of Mr. Ripley Ropes, who had already been named by independent citizens. He was at one with them in being a Republican and a believer in a non-partisan administration of municipal affairs.

In its efforts to secure harmonious action in opposition to the Democratic nominee, with his ring backing, the club appointed a committee to urge the withdrawal of both Tracy and Ropes. Mr. Low was chairman of the delegation appointed for the purpose, and was astonished when his consent to accept the nomination was made indispensable to the withdrawals which must precede the desired alliance.

AS MAYOR OF BROOKLYN.

The result of that campaign was the election of Mr. Low as the first Mayor of Brooklyn under its new charter. The candidate conducted, or participated in, a most energetic campaign. He spoke frequently and forcibly, visited workshops, wharves, and other scenes of industrial activity, making friends wherever he carried his personality into the canvass. Non-partisanship was one of the most conspicuous features of his Mayoralty administration, and it was distinctly upon, rather than in spite of, his record in that direction that the regular Republican organization in Brooklyn adopted him as its candidate for Mayor after he had been re-nominated at a mass meeting of citizens.

In the second campaign, which resulted in Mr. Low's re-election in 1883, Democratic attacks were directed mainly to the increased expenditures under his administration. Mr. Low believes that sparing expenditure is often very poor economy. He faced the attacks squarely, in his usual unshrinking fashion, and demonstrated that he had the more thoughtful part of the public with him.

Just as Tammany is crying out at the "extravagance" of Mayor Strong's administration now, so, then, the Democratic ringsters in Brooklyn attacked the showing of increased expenditures under Mayor Low. In his speeches Mr. Low put the question most clearly to the public as to whether it would rather have had its schools continue in their unsanitary condition of overcrowding, its Fire Department crippled for want of horses and other equipment, etc., throughout the various departments of the city government, in order that the tax rate might be kept down, or whether it preferred an increase more than counterbalanced by the approach made to efficiency. And the public gave its answer at the polls in favor of increased efficiency.

The four years under Mr. Low in Brooklyn made a new record in the administration of American municipalities. Brooklyn's experience showed that patronage could be disposed of according to merit instead of as a reward for partisan services. Employes learned that so long as they persevered in integrity and efficiency none could drive them from their work for the city, and that when they swerved therefrom no man could keep them in their positions. Mr. Low demonstrated that a Mayor could preside over the city, swayed by no politician or organization and actuated only by his own sense of what was best for the municipality. He made a record in regard to civil service which was of immense advantage, not only to Brooklyn, but to other cities and to the cause of civil service reform throughout the country. He showed what could be done, and abolished the possibility of talk of impracticability as an excuse for not doing it. In his first message to the Common Council Mr. Low said he hoped some day "to see a system authorized by law which shall save even the heads of departments from any concern about patronage by providing in some legal way for appointment on the clerical force of the city." At the beginning of his second term he was able to say, "the year 1883 will be memorable in the annals of the country for the first State civil service law passed in the United States by the great State of New York."

It was by the permision of that act that Mr. Low was able to introduce the merit system in the municipal service of Brooklyn, making it the first city in the country to adopt such rules. As Oswald Ottendorfer wrote in urging the re-election of Mayor Low in Brooklyn, the candidate had shown "his firm determination not to allow municipal affairs to be made a shuttlecock of political parties, nor to be perverted into a pasturage for party hacks."

That was Mr. Low's principle then as shown in his practice; that is the principle upon which his present candidacy is based. That is the principle which gave Brooklyn the best administration she ever had increased her credit, and suggests the wisdom of making the first Mayor of the enlarged municipality that man who showed his fitness to be the first Mayor of Brooklyn under its new charter.

Frequent conferences with the heads of all the departments insured harmonious action during Mr. Low's administration, without which much that he accomplished would have been impossible. But to his credit is mainly due the frustration and exposure of many steals contemplated by the Democratic ringsters through the agency of their good friends at Albany; the reorganization of the system under which taxes were collected, so that citizens of small means were relieved of a most irksome burden; the reduction of the city debt by $7,000,000, and a rearrangement of the public school system under a Board of Education which carried it to a high degree of efficiency.

HOME RULE FOR CITIES.

During his administration, as at all times, Mr. Low was a strenuous advocate of home rule. He missed no opportunity to urge an increase of the city's power of self-government, and did much to prevent attempts to curtail it at Albany.

One of the many instances of the facility with which Mr. Low grasps the right method of approaching questions is shown in a small, but striking way, by a circular proclamation which he issued to the boys of Brooklyn while acting as their Mayor, in which he made an appeal to their better feelings and civic sense to stop the building of bonfires in the streets on the evening of election day, instead of threatening to enforce the penalties provided by ordinance to prevent such practices. Among the many matters of public concern outside his official duties in which he showed an active interest, Mayor Low originated the suggestion which eventuated in the erection of the monument to veterans of the war at the entrance to Prospect Park.

Mr. Low's readjustment of the system of collecting taxes was in most consistent keeping with an action which gained him considerable notice at the time, though done unobtrusively and simply as a matter of conscience. It was years before his name had been mentioned in connection with the Mayoralty that Mr. Low demanded in the office of the Brooklyn City Assessor that the assessment on his personal property be raised from $1,000 to $10,000. No more striking example of self-sacrificing civic patriotism has ever been given, and more frequent emulation of the spirit which prompted it would quickly solve the perplexing problem of the collection of personal taxes.

At the end of Mr. Low's campaign it transpired that he had done something almost as remarkable in a candidate as was his demand in a citizen that his assessment be increased. It is uncommon now, it was still more remarkable in those days, that a candidate should go through a campaign without the expenditure of a cent in his own on behalf of his candidacy. When it transpired that such had been the case in Mr. Low's campaign of 1881, his action was made the theme of much commendation. Lest, however, there should be any misunderstanding on the subject, with his customary outspokenness Mr. Low called attention to the fact that since he had found himself, as a Citizens' candidate, unable to reciprocate in kind the friendly words spoken in his behalf by the Republican candidates for Sheriff and Supervisor-at-Large, he had sent a hundred dollars to the Republican Campaign Committee, with explicit instructions that it should not be used in the interest of his own candidacy.

Two years after the expiration of his second term as Mayor the firm of which Mr. Low was a member wound up its business. But a new outlet was soon provided for his activity, when his fellow-trustees unanimously offered him the presidency of Columbia College in October, 1889.

PRESIDENT OF COLUMBIA.

It was a remarkable honor to pay to a man so young that it was less than twenty years since he had been graduated from the great institution of which he was asked to become the head. The same characteristics which made Mr. Low's charity take the form of providing opportunity for work instead of giving alms, which made him appeal to the boys of Brooklyn instead of commanding them, which made him adopt the rule of common sense as his guide in dealing with the Sunday excise question, the trait, in fact, which enables him to put himself in the other fellow's place and readily adapt himself to circumstances with which he is unfamiliar, and the frankness of the man, led him at once not only to discover that he had much to learn, but to admit it. "I can bring no better equipment," he said, "than an open mind." And it is that open-mindedness which is one of Mr. Low's strongest and most attractive qualities.

The leading purpose of the new president was to make more intimate the association between Columbia College and the city, and in that, as in his administration as a whole, he has been highly successful. Under Mr. Low's seven years of administration one of the greatest institutions of learning in the country has been developed from what was then a college comparatively unknown. There has been going on there, under the guidance of Mr. Low, a process of evolution—if it has not been too speedy to warrant that name—similar to that which has resulted in the consolidation of the territory now comprising the city of New York.

Columbia has been turned into a university not only in name but essentially in fact. The law school has been reorganized and its requirements more than trebled. The College of Physicians and Surgeons has merged its individuality in the university; from the School of Mines has been developed the bigger, more modern, School of Applied Science, while a faculty of Pure Science has been established with incentives to original research. Improvement has been especially marked in the School of Political Science, which includes the study of sociology. The university staff of instruction having been doubled it now comprises nearly three hundred members. Alliances have been formed with the Teachers' College and Barnard College for Women, and intimate relations established with the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Union Theological Seminary, the General Theological Seminary and the Jewish Theological Seminary have all recognized the value of association with the university. Free lectures by Columbia lecturers at Cooper Union have forged another link in the union of the university with the city, and the municipality, through its individuals, has recognized the services of the university by gifts aggregating six million dollars. The ideal site on Morningside Heights has been chosen, buildings of appropriate dignity have been erected, and the university is now installed in its handsome new quarters, not the least magnificent of which is the library, built at a cost of a million dollars by Seth Low as a memorial to his father.

Student at Columbia College.

Only the few who have kept a close watch on this process of rapid development realize to what a great extent it owes its inception and execution to Mr. Low. Vast as has been the work involved at Columbia it was not sufficient to absorb all the energies of a man so public spirited and energetic as Mr. Low. In the very prime of life, carrying his years with ease, looking at least a decade younger than his age, intensely interested in all that concerns the welfare of the city, Mr. Low has found many useful outlets for his surplus energy. Transferring to the New York Kindergarten Association, which provides free kindergartens for those too poor to pay for them, his salary as a Rapid Transit Commissioner, he has given to the complicated problem under the consideration of the commission much valuable experience, time and discernment.

He devoted such careful and diligent study to the framing of the charter for the enlarged municipality that no man could be better equipped than he for the execution of the provisions which he helped to frame. He was always a sincere believer in the advisability of consolidation, and while there are many details of the charter which failed to satisfy him, he is convinced that if the people of the new city care to do so, it empowers them to obtain a proper administration of municipal affairs.

ARBITRATOR OF LABOR DISPUTES

One important department of Mr. Low's activity in recent years has been found in the arbitration of labor disputes. The task of umpire in such conflicts is generally a thankless one, and it is a remarkable tribute to the equity and ability of Mr. Low's decisions that not only has their fairness met with universal acknowledgement, but they have brought him the personal friendship or admiration of the contestants on both sides. Last Christmas one of the remembrances of the season which Mr. Low most highly prized was a gift jointly offered by members of opposing forces in a dispute which he settled to the satisfaction of both.

It is in this department, almost more than in any other, that Mr. Low has been able to demonstrate his wonderful faculty for promptly grasping details with which he was unfamiliar, by bringing to the question an open mind and the ability to put himself in the other fellow's place.

In 1896 Mr. Low was referee between the New York Typothetae and Typographical Union No. 6. In March, 1897, he was asked to determine the rights of the Enterprise Union of Steam Fitters and the Progress Union of Steam Fitters Helpers' and the Plumbers' Union. In both of these cases there were technical considerations which would have baffled any man of ordinary intelligence, who lacked the peculiar power referred to several times as one of Mr. Low's most marked traits. It is probably unprecedented, certainly so in as far as my knowledge goes, that a man of Mr. Low's wealth should have so merited and won the confidence of labor men as to be selected to settle their disputes one with another, and do it with such general satisfaction. It is probably partly due to the utter absence of anything like ostentation in his habits of life, and the success with which he has concealed, rather than displayed, his means and made them an instrument for usefulness.

It would be impossible to recount from memory the many public works of relief in which Mr. Low has figured. He was chairman of the Chamber of Commerce Committee which aided the Federal and local authorities in adopting precautions during the cholera scare of 1892, and the Secretary of the Treasury recognized his services by naming in his honor the camp for the reception of cholera patients which the United States Government established at Sandy Hook. Mr. Low was most active in the movement to find work for the unemployed during the distress of the Winter of 1894.

While Mr. Low has done much for the old city of New York since he moved his residence, and his availability for public services has been much appreciated and his work highly valued, it is to Brooklyn that one must go for the most enthusiastic devotion to the man. Brooklyn knows him, has known him all his life, and when New York knows him as well it will appreciate him as completely as Brooklyn does.

RAINSFORD TELLS WHY HE IS FOR LOW.

St. George's Rectory,
209 East Sixteenth street.

To the Editor of the Journal:

I CANNOT see how in the impending contest for the chief magistracy of Greater New York any confusion of mind is possible.

Of all the candidates Mr. Low alone stands with unmistakable firmness for the one thing our Greater New York sorely needs—the one thing which its position and importance demands, viz., a home rule government, bidding defiance to the modern curse of our municipal life—the boss.

Has bossism helped us heretofore? Can we hope for any truly enlightened, honest, economic rule under it? Why should we endure it any longer? The remedy is in our own hands.

What of the candidates? I have a very high opinion of Mr. George, but he now comes forward as the nominee of the Democratic party.

General Tracy presents himself as Mr. Platt's candidate.

Tammany has made our municipal government a by-word and a shame among all honest men who know anything of what municipal government should be, can be, and in many instances now is.

Mr. Low of all the candidates alone says: "Elect me because I stand for New York City first, last and all the time; not New York City and fat places for the Tammany boys; not New York City and the Republican platform, nor yet New York City and the Chicago platform, but plain New York, a big city, a fair city, and if we would do our duty by her, a great city that deserves nothing less at our hands than intelligent, honest and truly Democratic municipal government, of which all her citizens—nay, all Americans—should be justly proud."

Has bossism helped New York to such a fair estate? Bossism is the real hindrance to New York's fair prosperity. Bossism is the enemy of rich and poor alike, for it plunders each indiscriminately. Seth Low and his supporters are the declared and implacable enemies of each and every boss and system of bossism, whether it be bossism from Albany, Chicago or Washington. I say again, no other candidate before the people stands on this platform. No other candidate pretends to stand upon it, and on no other platform can our city's lasting prosperity stand.

Of course, I am in favor of other candidates retiring, but you cannot retire Mr. Low, for you cannot pull down the platform on which he alone stands. He points us the only way out. There is absolutely no other deliverance, if the first city on the American Continent is to be both fair and free.

W. J. Rainsford

If you a boarding house should seek,
Where coffee's choice and never weak,
Where dainties rare and well-cooked food
Are never scarce and always good,
Then in the Journal "wants" you'll find
The very best ones of the kind.

HENRY GEORGE.

Continued from Page Thirty-eight.

a shrine to visitors from the ends of the earth. The not infrequent disappointment of strangers at their first meeting with the author of "Progress and Poverty" and the leader of the mighty propaganda for industrial and social reform is one of Mr. George's sources of amusement, for nature has given him a quick sense of humor.

"Good heavens," the expression of the reverent pilgrim often says, "I thought you were a great man, but now I've seen you!"

Physically Mr. George is not an imposing personage. He is under five feet six, and it is only his noble head and fine face that save him from insignificance. His manner is without a trace of pose or self-consciousness. He is always himself, and his ingenuousness, which he carries into politics, is first the despair and then the inspiration of his advisers. His one dissipation is a cigar, the ashes of which commonly accumulate on his shoulder, dropped there as he gesticulates gently in conversation. Absent-mindedness has grown upon him with the years, and he leaves a trail of papers and handkerchiefs as he goes for others to rescue. His dress is plain and careless, and the loss of his umbrella an overcoat, and even his hat, is a weekly occurence. Where he is unknown and silent he does not impress. Once in a Pullman car, of which he was the only passenger, the porters gathered and told hard-luck stories that he overheard. On reaching the end of his journey, while the tall and comely descending mulatto was bending over him with his whisk-broom, Mr. George determined to make one poor devil happy, and gave him all the change he had in his pocket, several dollars. The porter gazed on the gorgeous tip, then at its diminutive bestower, threw up his hands and, with joyous chuckle, cried out: "I says it always, an' I says it agin; you never can tell nothin' about a frog till you sees him jump!"

You forget all about Henry George when you want of inches when you know him and hear him talk. Then he grows large as you smile. His talk is his honest thought, and it is his honest thought that has made the world receive him as one of its great men. Always he seizes upon the heart of his subject, and it is the directness of his mind, grasping the essential things intuitively, and waving away the incidentals that gives value and charm to his luminous conversation. What most other men accomplish by hard intellectual striving, he does without effort—which is to say that he is different from most other men in being a man of genius.